



Lessons Unlearned: Somalia and Joint Doctrine

By C. KENNETH ALLARD

As the Armed Forces prepare for new peacekeeping assignments, the lessons learned from operations in Somalia continue to have cutting-edge relevance. Some of those lessons were clearly learned and applied in Haiti, while others dominate planning for any Bosnian deployment. These specific insights are important for current and future operations, but our experience in Somalia also highlighted the enduring problem of effectively integrating joint operations. Despite the difficulties of working with the United Nations and coalition partners in a new, demanding class of missions, U.S.

forces were beset by deficiencies in joint operations which persist ten years after passage of the Goldwater-Nichols Act.¹ The larger lesson of the book on which this article is based, *Somalia Operations: Lessons Learned*, is that we must forge closer links among three processes: the way we plan operations, the way we draw lessons from those operations, and the way we apply the lessons in formulating joint doctrine.

Old Lessons, New Realities

Unified command is one of the oldest problems in joint operations, but there is widespread agreement that the concepts of unity, simplicity, and operational control underpin any command structure. However, during U.N. Operations in Somalia (UNOSOM) II there were three de facto chains of

command, namely, the United Nations, U.S. Central Command (CENTCOM), and U.S. Special Operations Command. As arduous as it was for CENTCOM to exercise operational control over various coequal units in a theater that was 9,000 miles from headquarters, the arrangements reflected the need to keep U.S. forces far removed from the reality or appearance of direct U.N. command. They also confirmed the relevance of standing doctrine and a lesson that should be added to Murphy's laws of armed combat: "If it takes more than ten seconds to explain the command arrangements, they probably won't work."

Another chronic problem was joint task force (JTF) organization. Even though JTFs have represented a balance between continuity of command and the integration of additional capabilities for more than fifty years, striking that balance in Somalia was a surprisingly random process. The humanitarian assistance survey team sent to coordinate the initial airlift had

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barely arrived before being redesignated as the JTF for complex and dangerous operations that lasted six months. Built around the nucleus of a Marine headquarters, the JTF that controlled United Task Force (UNITAF) gave way after a difficult transition to the hastily formed UNOSOM II staff.

The officers forming this staff had been individually recruited from Army units worldwide and only a third of them had arrived in-country by the time their mission was launched. When a JTF was added to UNOSOM II in the wake of the firefight in which

communications is the critical link in operations

18 Americans died, the 10th Mountain Division provided the nucleus with less than two weeks from initial notification to in-country hand-off and few organic capabilities for conducting joint or multinational operations. These difficulties were overcome through dedication, hard work, and professionalism of those sent to do a tough job. But the worrisome fact is that, during the period of UNOSOM II alone, U.S. forces also engaged in a dozen other major operations that required forming JTFs—from enforcing a no-fly zone over Iraq to providing flood relief at home in the Midwest.

Communications is the critical link in operations. While no Grenada-style interoperability fiascoes arose in Somalia, there were some similarities. For example, the same series of Army and Marine tactical radios had compatibility problems because of differing modernization and upgrade cycles. For the few weeks Navy ships were offshore, the Army hospital in Mogadishu could not talk to them nor were Army medical evacuation helicopter pilots cleared to land on them. Another problem was the stovepiping of different data systems. At the height of American involvement in a country that lacked even a functioning telephone system, at least *ten* different data systems were in use. Most were built on single service requirements but handled a host of common functions: intelligence, personnel, logistics, and even finance. Each system brought

its own logistical tail and competed for lane space on a narrow information highway—primarily the commercial INMARSAT satellite at a cost of six dollars per minute.

Another constant in joint operations is the planning process, especially as it influences force deployment and lift. While the joint operations planning and execution system (JOPES) forms the basis of that process, moving and sustaining the forces sent to Somalia revived the friction between the discipline needed to run the system and the flexibility demanded by warfighters. A great effort was required to reconcile bookkeeping methods for tracking Army units with the airlift deployment data to move them. Even so, telephone calls, faxes, and repeated visual checks were necessary to insure that the “ramp reality” agreed with airlift requirements in the automated data base. Similar problems afflicted sealift. Through a sad combination of rough

seas, inadequate port intelligence, and delayed deployment of transportation specialists, three Army pre-positioned ships spent weeks shuttling between East African ports. Two eventually returned to Diego Garcia without unloading their cargoes, a disturbing shortcoming in an environment which was austere but not the scene of combat operations.

While Somalia certainly illustrated the persistence of old problems, it also demonstrated the continuing importance of mission analysis in adapting existing capabilities to new circumstances. Several of those innovations may serve as precedents for the future:

Rules of engagement. Though common to every operation, ROE are especially important if the objective is to limit the level of violence. Somalia had the virtue of keeping ROE simple, direct, and unclassified so that they were as well understood by the local people as by the peacekeepers.

NOW IN ITS SECOND PRINTING

Somalia Operations: Lessons Learned

by Kenneth Allard

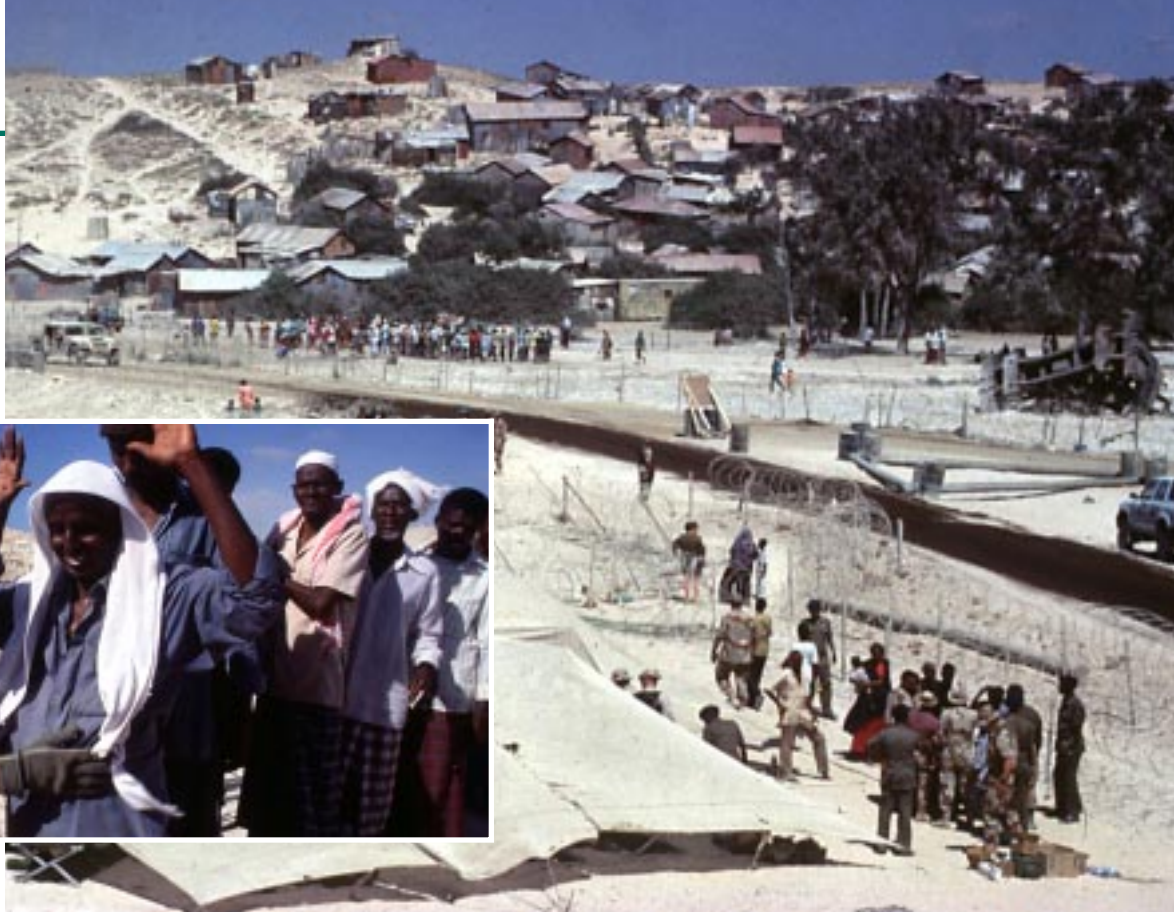
... there should be no mistaking the fact that the greatest obstacles to unity of command during UNOSOM II were imposed by the United States on itself. Especially at the end of the operation, these command arrangements had effectively created a condition that allowed no one to set clear, unambiguous priorities. . . .



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MEDCAP in Somalia.



U.S. Air Force (James Mossman)

U.S. Air Force (James Mossman)

Disarmament. During UNITAF, peacekeepers confiscated only weapons seen as a threat to the force, for example, crew-served weapons and arms caches. Disarming Somali clans, however, was a nation-building objective of UNOSOM II. The ensuing hostilities suggest that employing forces to disarm a populace is to commit those forces to a de facto combat mission as active belligerents.

Civil-Military Operations Center. Established early in UNITAF, this center was one of the most significant innovations of the operation. An outgrowth of the standard military approach to the liaison function, it became an invaluable way of coordinating information and activities between the JTF, multinational contingents, and 49 different international agencies operating in Somalia.

Mission Creep. Although much has been written on mission creep in Somalia, it is clear that the major changes in mission and direction came from the national command authorities. The object lesson for the future is that military leaders have a critical responsibility to select milestones that

best indicate mission success or failure. Many indicators in peace operations will differ from those in more conventional scenarios. But all must answer two critical questions: What is the mission and how will we know when we have accomplished it?

JULLS But Not Gems

The book, *Somalia Operations: Lessons Learned*, was principally based on those operational reports compiled through the joint universal lessons learned system (JULLS). This system has been a fixture since the mid-1980s when it was created in response to repeated General Accounting Office criticism of the lack of an automated system to evaluate joint training exercises. Administered by the Joint Staff (J-7), JULLS reports are solicited from individual participants in joint operations as well as from major headquarters and service components. Reports are reviewed by unified commands as well as the Joint Staff, usually to document remedial actions. Because it is a combination of service and joint reports linked by keywords, JULLS has a well-deserved reputation as a user-unfriendly system.

For that reason and also to look at the full scope of the operation, the Somalia archive was reduced to a hard-copy printout comprising some 200 separate reports totalling nearly 400 pages. The individual reports became more revealing as the relationships among them were tracked across all three phases of the Somalia operation: the early airlift and humanitarian assistance, the U.S.-led coalition of UNITAF, and the de facto combat of UNOSOM II that took place under U.N. control.

Although this unusual approach to the JULLS system of micro-analysis yielded some important macro-level insights, the Somalia archive also highlighted some fundamental problems in the way we collect and analyze our operational lessons:

- The JULLS system is built around individual reports that are primarily used to identify and solve specific problems. Because it is difficult to determine the linkage of these problems to larger issues solely through keyword searches, JULLS reports can be a “science of single events” unless they are related to other evidence (as actually occurred during this project).

- Individual JULLS reports range from the trivial to the profound; but because they lack specific context information or other corroborating data, it is often hard to

judge their validity. Worse, normal personnel turbulence and lengthy processing times often make it impossible to track down those who originally submitted them.

■ There is always tension between the candor needed for improvement and the perceived or actual potential for embarrassment caused by putting oneself on report. There is similar tension between the need

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for thoughtful review of JULS reports as they work their way through the system and the temptation to eliminate or water down those which show commands or services in an favorable light. Reports on the de facto combat phase of UNOSOM II, for instance, were delayed for months in the case of one command as such tensions were presumably thrashed out.

These problems suggest that the JULS system is a throwback to an era in joint operations when fault finding was studiously avoided to preserve interservice comity. Because of institutional reluctance to trace operational effects back to first causes, the system acts as an endlessly repetitive *lessons unlearned* exercise that usually resolves only marginal issues. As one jaded veteran put it: "I could take any operation we're starting next week and write the first 30 JULS today."

Doctrinal Changes and Constants

A system that concentrates on after-the-fact fixes that never seem to recur in just the same way is singularly ineffective in dealing with a constantly changing international environment. The volatility of this environment creates incentives for the Armed Forces to master the most persistent obstacles to the integration of joint capabilities. How else do we deal with chaos and adaptive adversaries than by eliminating those difficulties which we can and should control?

The solution is to link what we say to what we actually do. Specifically, it means a closer alignment of functions that often proceed independently: the way joint operations are planned and evaluated, and the way

joint doctrine is validated. Such linkage is essential to subjecting new ideas on joint warfare to operational testing and rigorous analysis. The process suggested here is a more systematic approach to field testing ideas on jointness through exercises, training, readiness, and combat itself (see figure 1).

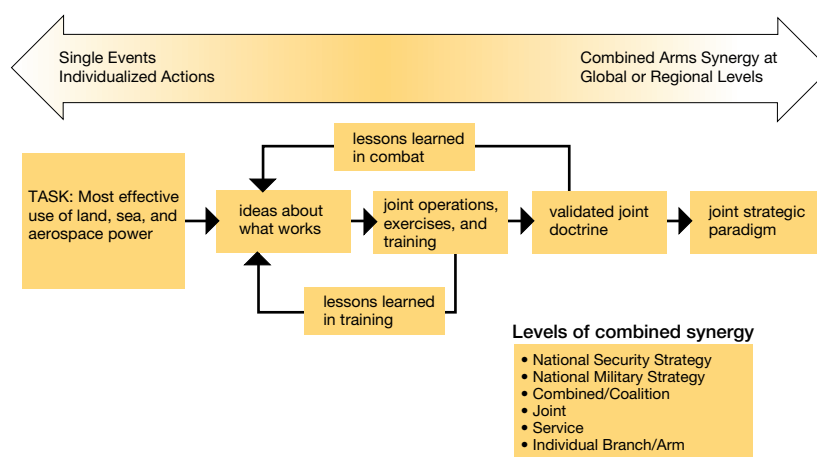
Refining ideas through the operation of organized feedback loops is what will yield a body of joint doctrine validated by systematic operational testing. Although it is uncertain if this process might lead to an overarching joint paradigm as a complement to the American way of war, developing an integrated body of doctrine validated by field experience is a basic goal in itself.²

Current practice could not be farther from this ideal. There are 103 titles in the hierarchy of joint pubs, a staggering number considering that compiling joint doctrine did not really begin until after Goldwater-Nichols. Eye-numbing page counts further compound the problem: a new publication on noncombatant evacuation procedures is more than 200 pages. While no human could possibly read such a vast array, few would ever want to, since the writing is notoriously verbose and stilted. Yet the most precarious aspect

about what now passes for joint doctrine is that it was compiled by diligently polling the usual sources—the services and other affected parties. That practice would not pose a dilemma if the results were simply taken as tentative ideas about what works and then subjected to field testing. But as matters stand, the only consistent tests are the least common denominators: brokered solutions and bureaucratic interests.

This military equivalent of political correctness contrasts sharply with the more forthright approach the Army adopted a decade ago, with compulsory after action reviews at every level of training and operations planning. While neither perfect nor painless, the process promoted candid self-improvement that eventually was imbedded in service culture. It also tied operations planning to lessons learned in a period of vigorous doctrinal experimentation—much of it aided by computer simulation and sophisticated technology. That precedent underlines what the services do best: provide laboratories to develop the basic elements of combat power. Joint institutions must now provide an essential counterpoint by searching for new ways to combine those elements—with next-generation simulations playing the role in larger combinations that they now exercise in training individual warriors. As one observer recently

The Evolution of Joint Doctrine and Strategy



Source: C. Kenneth Allard, *Command, Control, and the Common Defense* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990), p. 261.

noted, "It is hypothetical wars, not real ones, that will shape doctrine in the years to come."³

All the more reason, then, to use the analytical rigor of modelling and

muddling through is no longer an acceptable alternative

simulation to tackle head on the disturbing tendency in joint operations to keep making the same mistakes. Among other things, this means not putting the cart before the horse. Rather than being inflated with additional volumes of indigestible prose, the current collection of joint doctrine needs to be screened for those fundamental organizing principles which ought to guide the integrated employment of joint combat power, including criteria to decide when operations should be joint and when they can be handled by a single service. Those concepts should be tried and tested through joint exercises conceived with such specific purposes in mind. A JULLS process truly worthy of the name could play a vital role in supporting this process, much as Army after-action reviews contributed to the refinement of AirLand Battle doctrine. A new body of field-tested joint doctrine would also validate the artificial dividing lines in the current hierarchy of joint doctrine by distinguishing bedrock principles from the mass of tactics, techniques, and procedures that are part of the operational infrastructure but are far more transient. That distinction alone would be a worthwhile contribution to educating future joint warfighters, a well-understood baseline being fundamental to the virtuoso improvisations that will be expected of them in years to come.

Shaping the Future

The ultimate expression of such a revised approach to joint doctrine might not necessarily be contained in another series of publications even if the writing and methodology were improved. The next generation of expert computer systems can significantly aid joint planning, provided that we first clarify our assumptions about linking thoughts to actions. It does not take a

leap of faith to conceive of future cyber-systems serving as trusted associates to those hard-pressed humans who function as operations planners. The person in this future loop, however, would be able to draw on his own professional experience as well as artificial intelligence to reconcile unique mission requirements with joint doctrinal principles and even the most recent operational insights. In that way, current operations could be linked far more effectively to our best ideas about what works and what does not.

But future possibilities and persistent problems evoke a familiar argument: this is just the normal cost of doing business and is more than offset by a genius for muddling through, especially when the chips are down. But like many familiar arguments, this one has outlived its usefulness. There are four related reasons why muddling through is no longer an acceptable alternative:

- The international security environment will be marked by continuous discontinuities for the foreseeable future. It is a basic requirement that forces operating in this environment not only limit their vulnerabilities but also act more quickly and effectively than an adversary. In a chaotic environment, we must first eliminate self-induced disorder.

- One of the most important environmental discontinuities is technology. Whether change is seen as an ongoing military-technical revolution, a future revolution in military affairs, or a much larger revolution in the security arena, it will profoundly affect the integration of joint capabilities. Given the pace and scope of this revolution, failing to test assumptions about jointness is extremely dangerous. Basically, high tech means tighter teamwork. But often it takes a tragic mistake (such as the shoot down of the Blackhawks over northern Iraq in 1994) to highlight the inadequacies of old thinking and outmoded assumptions.

- Because this new security environment presents difficulties for policymakers, the military is being asked to do more with less. With declining force levels and budgets, there is less margin for error in what we do or how we do it. Persistent errors become vulnerabilities to be exploited by an

enemy. As crises from Somalia to Bosnia already indicate, adversaries can offset military inferiority with innovative tactics that take advantage of errors on our part.

- Somalia reveals that many institutional mistakes are corrected (when the chips really *are* down) only through extraordinary efforts by junior officers, NCOs, and most of all by individual soldiers, sailors, marines, and airmen. Our senior leaders, however, have a special obligation to limit the need for such heroic efforts and sacrifices.

Senator Strom Thurmond recently defined stupidity as doing the same thing over and over while expecting different results. We should by now realize the basis of the historical problem in joint doctrine as well as the futility of expecting different results from the same muddled processes. Those with responsibility for the further development of this uniquely American joint culture might well consider what must be done to set these things right. **JFQ**

NOTES

¹ This article draws on the author's recently published book entitled *Somalia Operations: Lessons Learned* (Washington: National Defense University Press, 1995).

² C. Kenneth Allard, *Command, Control, and the Common Defense* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990), pp. 260–62.

³ "The Software Revolution," *The Economist*, vol. 335, no. 7918 (June 10, 1995), p. 10.